

THE EARLY SCULPTURES FROM SĀRNĀTH

Numerous excavations¹ have been carried out at Sārnāth since 1798 when its ruins first received public attention as a result of the depredations of the Dharmarājikā Stūpa by Jagat Singh². In spite of the numerous pieces of early Indian sculpture discovered at Sārnāth, there has been no extensive attempt to analyse and categorize these pieces on the basis of their obvious stylistic differences³. This is a surprising oversight in view of the fact that the early pieces discovered at Sārnāth provide evidence of a sculptural style that shows a clear line of development from the Mauryan times to a period roughly contemporaneous with Bodhgayā and Sāñchī Stūpa 1 (see breakdown into four phases in Appendix A). By selecting some of the larger and less damaged pieces found at Sārnāth, it is possible to create a chronology on the basis of stylistic analogies with sculptures from the well known sites of north India. The smaller and/or more damaged fragments of sculptures from Sārnāth support the chronological evolution demonstrated by an analysis of the major pieces. Their role is, therefore, not to extend the chronological limits of style, but to substantiate the evolution traced through the larger and less damaged pieces.

1. The four major excavations at Sārnāth were carried out between 1904 and 1915 and their results were published in the *Archaeological Survey of India Annual Report*: F. O. OERTEL (1904-5), J. H. MARSHALL & S. KONOW (1906-7 and 1907-8), H. HARGREAVES (1914-15). A full synopsis of the nineteenth century attempts to examine the site by CUNNINGHAM, THOMAS, etc., is to be found in V. S. AGRAWALA's account in *Sārnāth* (Kanpur, 1956), pp. 6-8.

2. V. S. AGRAWALA, *Sārnāth* (Kanpur, 1956), p. 6.

3. The excavators themselves tended to place most of these early sculptures in the general category of Mauryan. Prof. BACHHOFFER's short account in *Early Indian Sculpture* (New York, 1972, reprint.), pp. 12-3, is an exception although he has confined his discussion to the few heads discovered by HARGREAVES in 1914-15. ADRI BANNERJEE's article in *Roop-Lekha* (1952-53), pp. 11-22, is not concerned with rigorous stylistic analyses.

These early sculptures from Sārnāth fall into four major stylistic phases, which for convenience have been labelled Mauryan, proto-Bhārhut or transitional, a phase contemporaneous with Bhārhut, and finally a phase parallel with Bodhgayā and Sāñchī Stūpa 1⁴. Since none of these pieces from Sārnāth is dated, this four part division on the basis of sculpture whose approximate chronological sequence is widely accepted appears to be the most appropriate procedure to follow. An object's findspot is often useful in arriving at general conclusions regarding the dates of sculptures. However, on this site analysis of the findspot and related objects is of no pertinent use. The site has undergone numerous disturbances prior to excavations as is demonstrated by Hargreave's excavation where vast quantities of heterogenous sculptural fragments were found reused as filling⁵. In the absence of any external clues for dating these works the only reliable basis for categorizing them is to establish a chronological sequence based on stylistic analyses.

The most famous of discoveries made at Sārnāth is the Aśokan capital (Fig. 1) and fragments of its column found during the 1904-1905 excavations conducted by F.O. Oertel⁶. Since there is no doubt as to the identification and date of this monument as Mauryan, it provides an extremely valuable reference point by which to analyse and date some of the fragments discovered at Sārnāth. Among the heterogenous mass of material uncovered by Hargreaves to the west of the Main Shrine there are some that clearly cluster around this Mauryan capital⁷. These consist of fragments of birds (Hargreaves plate LXVI, nos. 6-14), various fragments of animals (Hargreaves plate LXVI, nos. 15-20 & 23) and fragmentary panels decorated by louts rhizome (Hargreaves plate LXVIII, nos. 19, 22 & 23). A comparison of these fragments with sculptures generally accepted as Mauryan such as the lion capitals of Rāmpurvā and Sāñchī will clarify their grouping in the first phase of our four part division. This comparison with other Mauryan capitals is more

4. For the purposes of this analysis Bodhgayā and Sāñchī Stūpa 1 are grouped together, not because there is no evident stylistic difference between the two schools, but because they both represent developments in the first century B.C. in north India. Implicit in this statement is P. CHANDRA's thesis that after BHĀRHUT, « two trends can be seen in early Indian sculpture, one evolving in the direction of the railings of the Mahābodhi Temple and the Jewel Walk at Bodhgayā and the other in the rich and sensuous splendours of the gateways of the Great Stūpa at Sāñchī ». *Catalogue of the Stone Sculpture in the Allahabad Museum* (Poona, 1971, p. 20).

5. H. HARGREAVES, « Excavations at Sārnāth », *Archaeological Survey of India Annual Reports*, 1914-15, pp. 108-11.

6. F. O. OERTEL, « Excavations at Sārnāth », *Archaeological Survey of India Annual Reports*, 1904-5, pp. 68-70. The column is identified as Aśokan on the basis of a fragmentary edict. See J. IRWIN, « "Aśokan" Pillars: a reassessment of the evidence - II. Structure ». *The Burlington Magazine*, 116 (Sep.-Dec. 1974), p. 719.

7. H. HARGREAVES, « Excavations at Sārnāth », 1914-15, pp. 108-11. HARGREAVES refers to all these as Mauryan and other early remains without any effort to categorize them in a chronological sequence. Precise dimensions of panels with floral rhizome are not available.

than fortuitous as numerous fragments of other columns were excavated⁸ suggesting that perhaps these fragmentary birds and animals might possibly have been decorative elements on now lost columns also of the Mauryan period.

The obvious comparison for the fragmentary remains of birds are the geese depicted on the Rāmpurvā lion capital and the lion capital from Sāñchī⁹. The one quality that distinguishes the geese on both these monuments is the depiction of swelling volumes without obscuring the basic structure of the animal form. The well-fed roundness of the geese in no way obscures the tense musculature of the downward curving neck or that of the legs. Precisely this mixture of swelling flesh with an anatomically correct rendering of the taut muscles is to be seen in the fragments of birds found at Sārnāth¹⁰. The areas around the head, neck and lower portions of the body are very similar to those on the two capitals. The flesh is not soft and flabby, but tense with the bone and muscle structure that supports the body. The crisp rendering of the feathers and the fluid and tensile grace with which the neck and legs are rendered do not contrast with the round fleshy areas of the body, but clarify for us the Mauryan sculptor's sure understanding of the intrinsic structures that subsist beneath all forms, fleshy or otherwise.

This same combination of swelling forms with firm musculature is to be seen on other animals of the Mauryan period, such as the animals on the abacus of the Sārnāth lion capital. The basic bone structure on the bull and elephant is in clear evidence while the flesh that covers the frame is rounded, but not flaccid. Clearly the flesh is held together by tendons and muscles realized with firmness as in the hind leg of the bull or the upper part of the left foreleg of the elephant. The same sure rendering of flesh and muscles is to be noticed in some of the animal fragments found at Sārnāth and suggests a Mauryan dating for these pieces¹¹. Particularly noteworthy are fragments of sitting bulls (Hargreaves plate LXVI, nos. 16 & 17) where the smooth, swelling surface is animated by the play of muscles. This balanced presentation of flesh and musculature is to be found neither at Bhārhut nor at Sāñchī.

8. F. O. OERTEL, « Excavations at Sārnāth », 1904-5, pp. 99-101. H. HARGREAVES, « Excavations at Sārnāth », 1914-15, p. 117.

9. Both capitals have most recently been discussed and reproduced by J. IRWIN in his articles in *The Burlington Magazine*, 115 (1973), pp. 708-20; 116 (1974), pp. 714-27; 117 (1975), pp. 631-43; 118 (1976), pp. 734-53.

10. These bird fragments have been variously identified as belonging to pigeons, pheasants, and game birds. H. HARGREAVES, « Excavations at Sārnāth », 1914-15, p. 114. In height they range from 3½" to 6¾": Plate LXVI, no. 6 is 5¼", no. 7 is 5½", no. 8 is 5", no. 9 is 3½", no. 10 is 4", no. 11 is 6¾", no. 14 is 3¼". Dimensions for numbers 12 and 13 are not available.

11. H. HARGREAVES, « Excavations at Sārnāth », 1914-15, pp. 115-16. The animal fragments belong to various animals such as nilgai, bull, lion and elephant. These animal fragments range from a height of 3" to 8¾". Plate LXVI, no. 15 is 3¾", no. 16 is 8", no. 17 is 8¾", no. 18 is 4¼", no. 19 is 3" and no. 23 is 6". Height for number 20 is not available.

Animals of the Bārhut period are abstracted into cubic forms, as a comparison of the galloping horse on the Sārnāth abacus with the griffin from Bhārhut in the Indian Museum in Calcutta makes evident¹². In the Sāñchī Stūpa 1 period the quality of the flesh is soft and resilient with the muscle structure scarcely in evidence. In fragment numbers 16 and 17 (Hargreaves plate XVI) the haunches of the animals are full, but their surface is animated with the surge of flexed muscles. It is this attention and emphasis given to the animating strength of muscle structure that distinguishes the rendering of Mauryan animals from all others.

The fragments with floral decoration (Hargreaves plate LXVIII, nos. 19, 22 & 23) have been designated Mauryan on the basis of comparison with foliage on the abacus of the Rāmpurvā bull capital and those on stone discs from Bharat Kala Bhavan, Varanasi, specifically the fragment with Goddess and Antelope¹³. The foliage on both these is to be distinguished from those of Bhārhut and Sāñchī Stūpa 1, as they have neither the flat, linear rendering of the former nor the heavy succulent quality of the latter. Rather if anything, they seem to be depicted in a style that happily mediates between these two extremes. The branches and tendrils of Mauryan pieces curve firmly and crisply, and the petals of the flowers are defined with clarity and with rounded surfaces that do not have the bulbousness of Sāñchī Stūpa 1 flora. Fragment number 23 (Hargreaves plate LXVIII) exemplifies these qualities. The downward curving stems that terminate in lotuses have rounded surfaces that do not meet the pictorial plane at right angles as at Bhārhut, nor are the flowers and buds so sap-laden as to pull them downwards with the slow, sagging droop of flowers at Sāñchī Stūpa 1. The stems on the Mauryan depictions bend and twine with the supple buoyancy that we have noticed in the movement of Mauryan animals.

The next stylistic phase is one of transition leading from the Mauryan period to the Bhārhut phase. This stylistic phase is represented by several fragments of heads both human and animal. The style of this phase shows a movement away from the finely balanced equipoise between the basic structure of forms and the tightly rendered, rounded flesh that overlies the bony structure, without any loss of the energizing lines of the one or the plasticity of the other. In this transitional phase we are confronted with stark structure. The flesh has been peeled away to reveal the framework. This peeling off of the flesh does lead to

12. A. COOMARASWAMY, *La Sculpture du Bharhut*, Annales du Musée Guimet, Nouvelle Série, VI (1956), p. 85, fig. 139. For other animal depictions from Bhārhut see S. C. KALA, *Bhārhut Vedikā* (Allahabad, 1951), nos. 17, 18, 24, 28 and 30.

13. P. CHANDRA, « The Cult of Śrī Lakshmi and Four Carved Discs in Bharat Kala Bhavan », *Chavvi* (Benares, 1971), pp. 139-48, fig. 295. The chronology of stone discs is also analysed by P. CHANDRA in his *Catalogue of Stone Sculpture in the Allahabad Museum*, pp. 116-17.

what at first might appear to be a flattening of forms. However, what we have is not so much flattening as an incredibly subtle modulation of planes, which taken a few steps further results in the relentless flattening and abstraction which finds its ultimate expression at Bhārhut.

This effect of subtle modulation of planes is seen in the horned animal head sometimes referred to as a « *nīlgai* » (Fig. 2)¹⁴. We are at a fair remove from the animals of the Sārnāth capital. The softly swelling areas around the head and jaws of the elephant on the Sārnāth capital have been sliced away. This results in a less plastic effect as the play of light and shadow brought into effect by the recessions and swells of the flesh have been drastically reduced. Yet the resulting impression is scarcely less fine and pleasing. The light that plays on the subtly graded planes reveals the anatomical correctness and the finely observed bony facets which are the basis of Mauryan depictions and give them their supremely arresting forms. This observation of basic structure and its correct anatomical rendering does not last beyond this transitional or proto-Bhārhut phase. By the time Bhārhut's artistic activity is encountered on the Indian scene, verisimilitude is superseded by an intense interest in presentations that reduce forms to magnificently cubical renditions. As comparison we have the lion head from Bhārhut also in the Indian Museum in Calcutta¹⁵. Like the so called *nīlgai* head from Sārnāth, the lion head is sculpture in the round rather than a frieze, but its treatment of the animal form is quite unlike that of the piece from Sārnāth. The eyes have been presented as triangles, the mouth as a rectilinear construct bounded by the parallel lines of the upper and lower lips, the nose is a series of strict parallel ridges and the tongue consists of two rectilinear forms draped over the lower lip. These geometrical surfaces have been coherently and consistently rendered, but the anatomy of the head has been subsumed in an aesthetic concern that runs counter to the Mauryan spirit still very much in evidence in the *nīlgai* head. To this phase also belong other animal fragments discovered by Hargreaves in 1914-1915 (Hargreaves plate LXVI, nos. 21 & 22). These two fragments have been identified as belonging to a bull¹⁶. Small as they are, their relation to the *nīlgai* head with regard to the structure and the subtle modulation of planes is evident.

14. H. HARGREAVES, « Excavations at Sārnāth », 1914-15, p. 115, no. 52. This head was discovered among the fragments that were used as filling in an area to the west of the Main Shrine, pp. 110-11. The head is 9½ high.

15. For this piece from Bhārhut and others from the same site, now in The Indian Museum in Calcutta, photographs taken by Prof. P. CHANDRA (filed in The Epstein Archive of the University of Chicago) have been consulted.

16. H. HARGREAVES, « Excavations at Sārnāth », 1914-15, p. 115. No. 21 is 4" high and no. 22 is 3⅛" high.

Together with the nīlgai head Hargreaves uncovered six major fragments of human heads during the 1914-1915 excavations (Figs. 3-5)¹⁷. A seventh head of the same stylistic phase as the six heads discovered by Hargreaves is listed in the Sārnāth Museum Catalogue, but its find-spot is uncertain¹⁸. Hargreaves designates the nīlgai head and the six human heads as Mauryan, and Sahni discusses the seventh head as either Mauryan or Śuṅga as it is of highly polished sandstone and was, according to him, found somewhere in the area to the north-west of the Main Shrine¹⁹. Neither Hargreaves nor Sahni's dating is based on a precise comparative analysis of the style of the pieces in question. Bachhofer, on the other hand, considered these human heads a stylistic link between Mauryan art and the art of the subsequent period, i.e. the art of Bhārhut²⁰. Bachhofer is correct in his designation, as the distinguishing quality of these heads is the reduction of forms to their basic structure. The muscular strength of the Mauryan animals is still to be seen in the powerful neck (Fig. 3) and the firmness in rendering the flesh along the ears (Fig. 5) and along the jaws (Fig. 3). At the same time we are made to realize that the Mauryan style is undergoing such changes as to make these heads a prelude to Bhārhut.

The moustached head (Fig. 4) shows this emphatic movement towards the cubic scheme of Bhārhut. This head is sharply squared at the crown with the cheeks and moustaches forming symmetrical geometric shapes. The eyes are roughly triangular with ridged upper and lower lids. The whole head creates a mask-like impact scarcely a step removed from Bhārhut. Bachhofer had remarked on the similarity of the pinched, downward curving mouth of the Sārnāth heads to those of Bhārhut, and one need hardly belabour the point with such examples as the mouth of the head in Fig. 3. However, the two striking features that distinguish these heads from Bhārhut are the distinct anchoring of structural forms to anatomical correctness and the lingering roundness in the depiction of the flesh. The former is seen in such areas as the smooth transition from the forehead to the nose (Fig. 3), and the rendering of the forehead itself which is not reduced to smooth flatness

17. *Ibid.*, plate LXVI, nos. 1-5. The sixth head, 6" high, is not illustrated in the excavation report but it appears to be no. 3 described by HARGREAVES on p. 112 of his report. No. 1 is 6½", no. 2 is 3¾", no. 3 is 7⅞", no. 4 is 8", no. 5 is 5⅞" high.

18. D. R. SAHNI, *Catalogue of the Museum of Archaeology at Sārnāth* (Calcutta, 1914), p. 32. According to SAHNI, OERTEL discovered this during the 1906-7 excavations, however, the 1906-7 excavations were carried out not by OERTEL but by MARSHALL and KONOW. The author does not recognise this head in descriptions of objects uncovered in either the OERTEL report of 1904-5 or the MARSHALL & KONOW report of 1906-7. SAHNI's measurements for this head are 8" by 6¼, pp. 32. Photographs of all these heads have been consulted at The Epstein Archive, Department of Art, University of Chicago.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 32.

20. BACHHOFER discusses only two of these heads in *Early Indian Sculpture* (New York, 1972, reprint), p. 14. These are both reproduced by HARGREAVES, plate LXVI, no. 1 (6½" high), and no. 5 (5⅞" high).

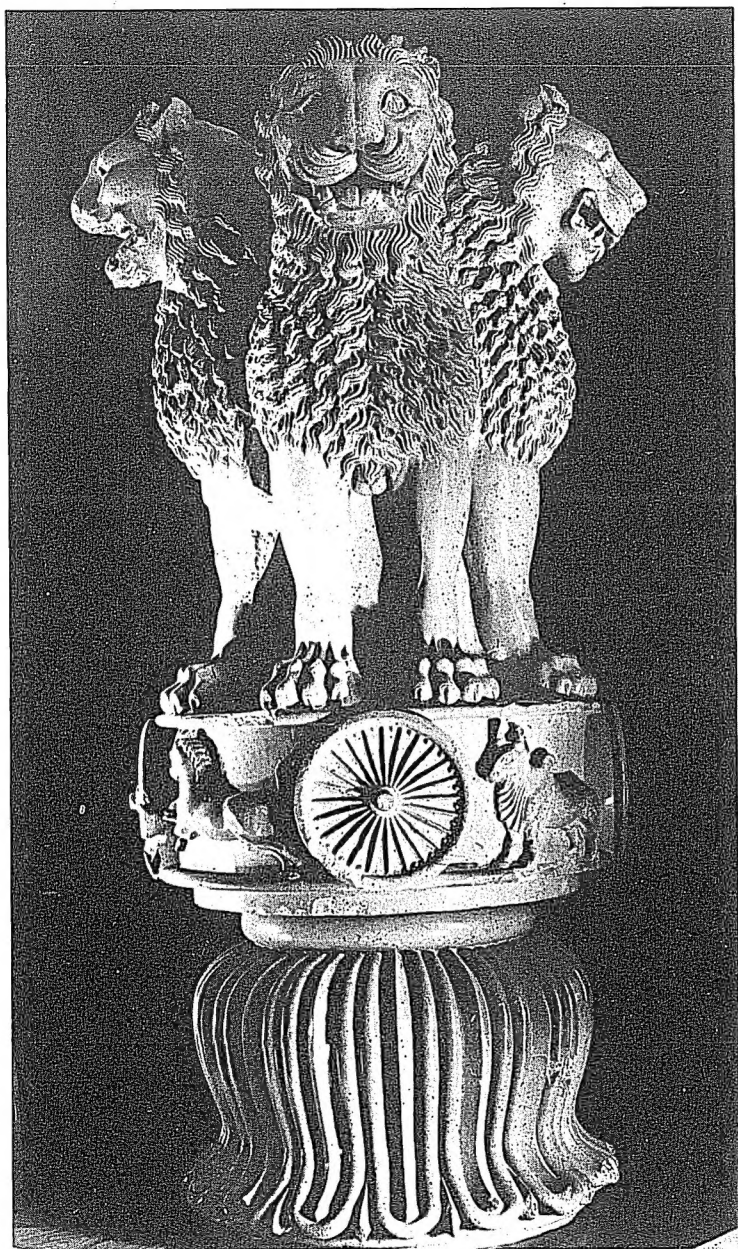


Fig. 1: Lion Capital from Sarnath. Photograph courtesy of Dr. B.N. Sharma, The National Museum of India, New Delhi.

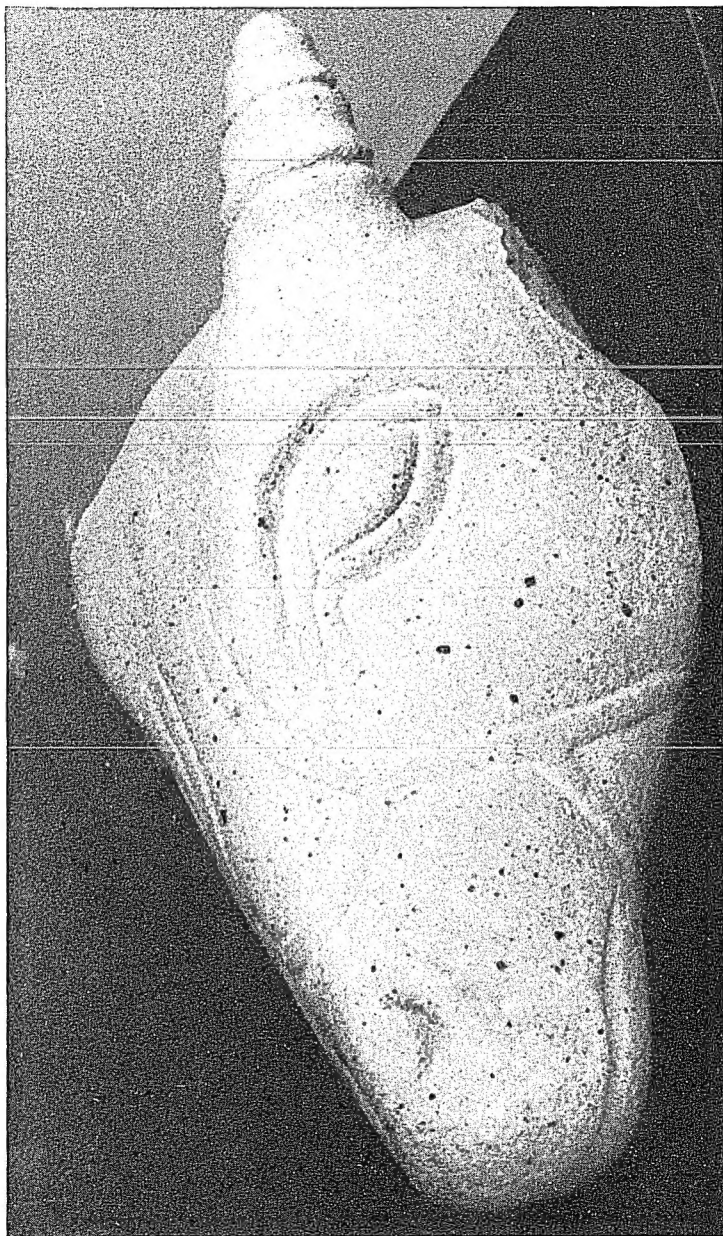


Fig. 2: Nilgai Head, Sarnāth. Photograph courtesy of Prof. P. Chandra, Harvard University.

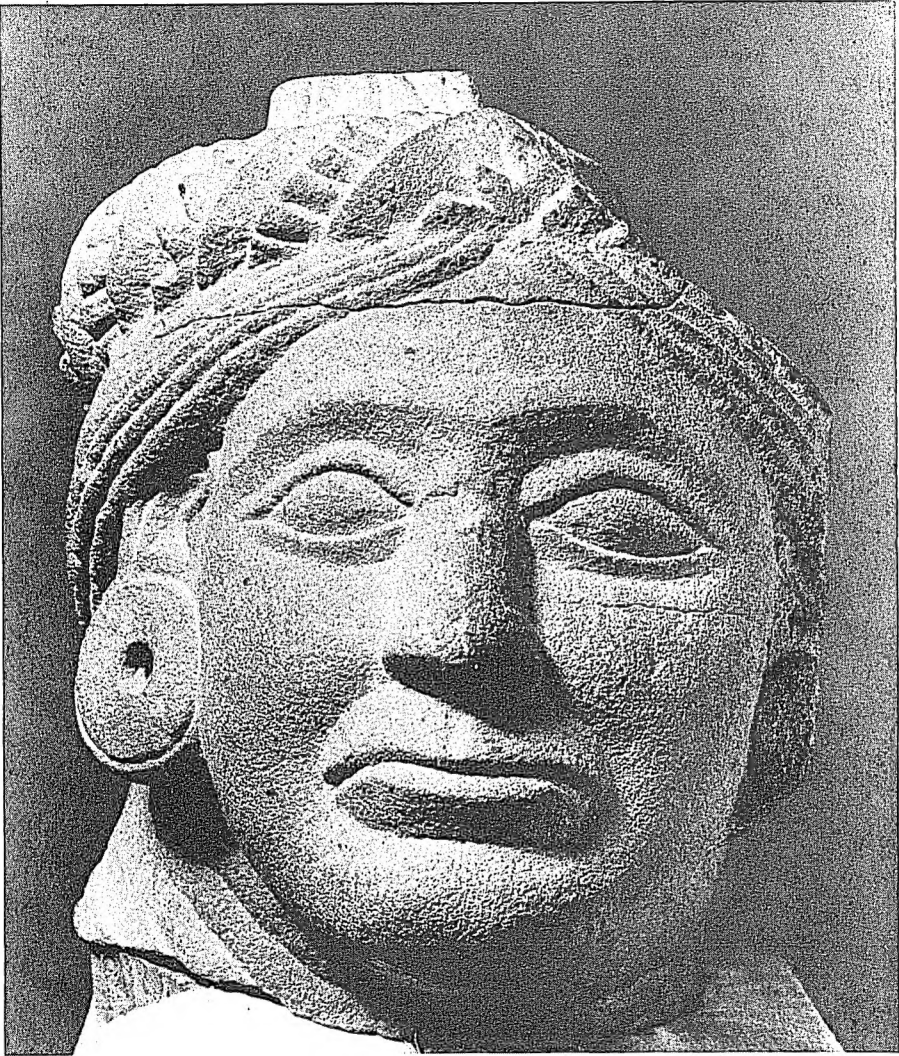


Fig. 3: Turbaned Head from Sārnāth. Photograph courtesy of Dr. B.N. Sharma, The National Museum of India, New Delhi.



Fig. 4: Moustached Head from Sarnath. Photograph courtesy of Dr. B. N. Sharma, The National Museum of India, New Delhi.



Fig. 5: Head, horned. Sārnāth. Photograph courtesy of Prof. P. Chandra, Harvard University.

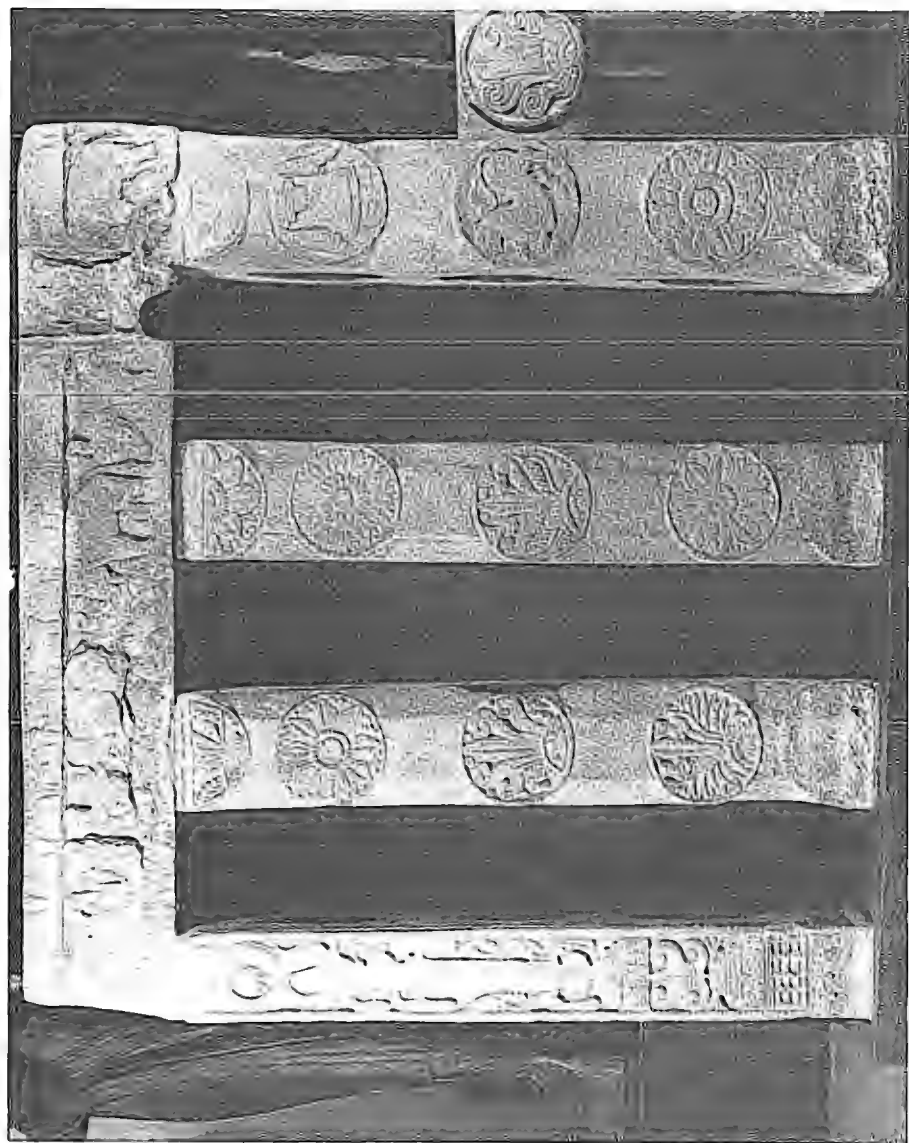


Fig. 6: Railing Posts from Sarnath. Photograph courtesy of Dr. B. N. Sharma,
The National Museum of India, New Delhi.

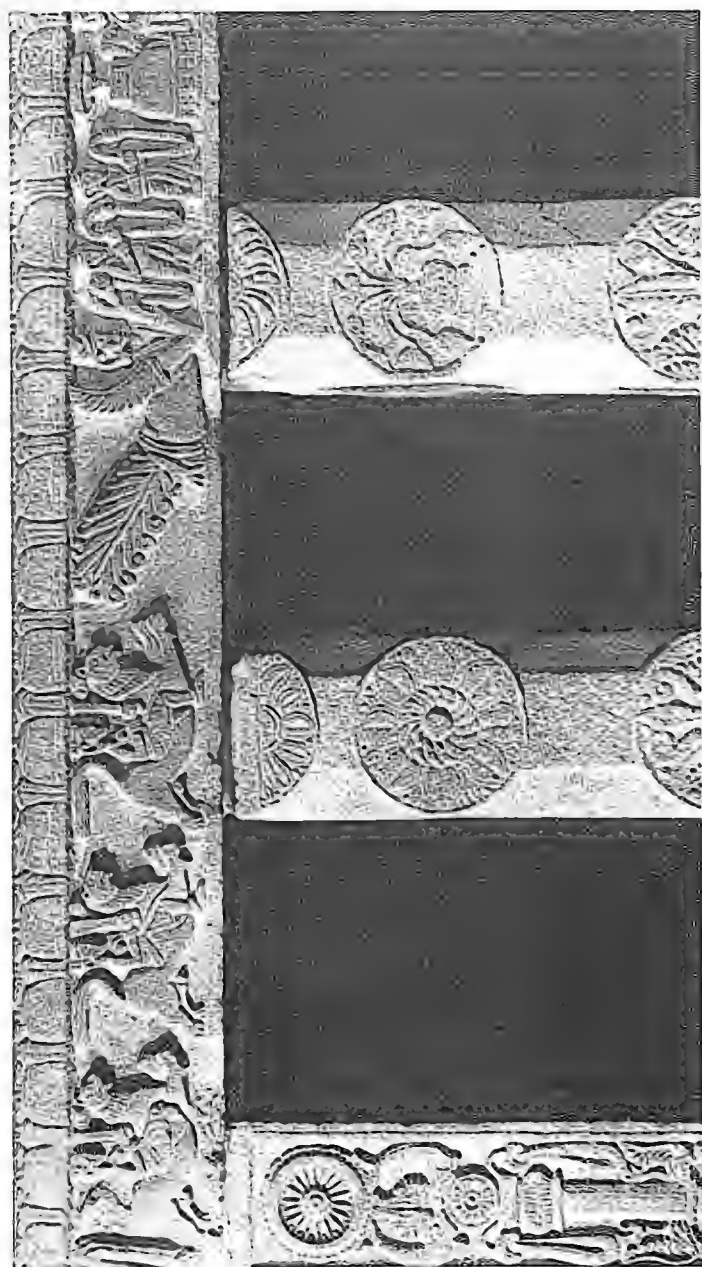


Fig. 7: Lintel from Sarnath. Photograph courtesy of Dr. B. N. Shatma, The National Museum of India, New Delhi.



Fig. 8. Yakṣa from Sārṇāth. Photograph courtesy of Prof. P. Chandra, Harvard University.

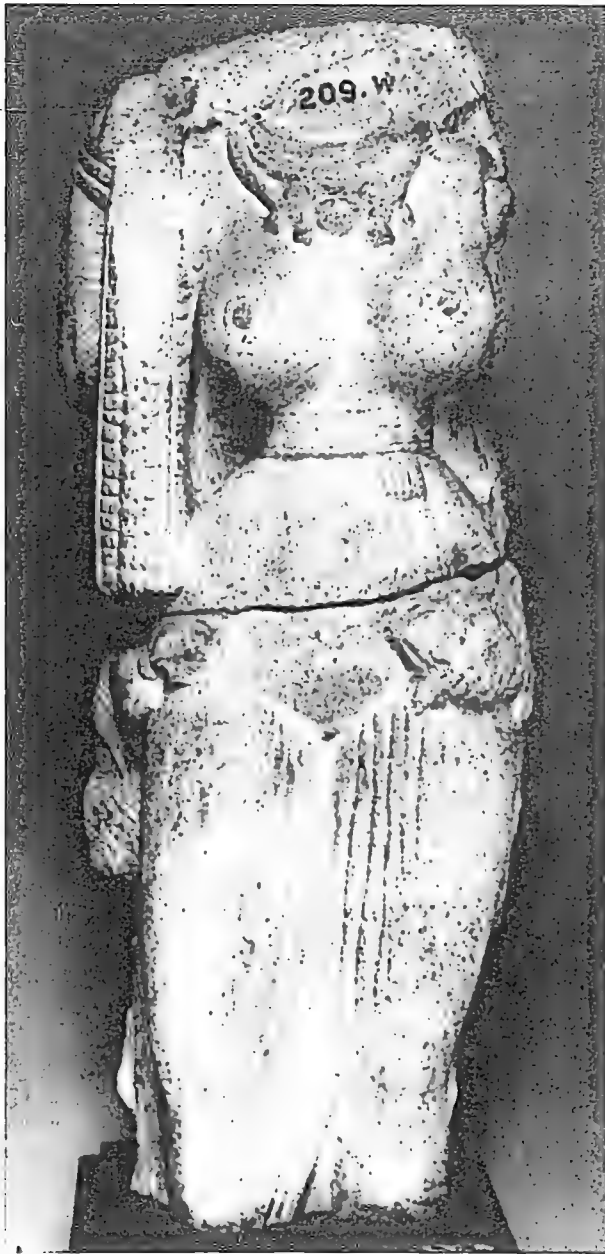


Fig. 9: Yakṣi from Sārnāth. Photograph courtesy of Prof. P. Chandra, Harvard University.



Fig. 10: Head of Yakṣi from Sārnāth. Photograph courtesy of Prof. P. Chandra, Harvard University.



Fig. 11: Bas-relief from Sarnath. Photograph courtesy of Dr. B. N. Sharma, The National Museum of India, New Delhi.



Fig. 12: Capital from Sarnath. Two views. Photograph courtesy of Prof. P. Chandra, Harvard University.

as at Bhārhut, but rendered with the bony structures animating the surface (Fig. 3). The rendering of cheeks, jaws and temples is likewise the result of a firm grasp of the human anatomy (Fig. 3). With a close observation of anatomical structure is coupled a keen interest in conveying a variety of individualized faces, so that although sometimes there is a mask-like quality to these heads, they are always vitally differentiated from each other. This emphasis on the temporal character of the human face together with close observation of structure is lost at Bhārhut. The second distinguishing quality, that of depicting strong, swelling forms, is to be seen in such areas as the neck (Fig. 3) and the faun-like ears (Fig. 5). All these areas create a sense of mass and volume, and impart a gentler texture to the harder surface of the bone structure.

The next phase of stylistic evolution is represented by many more pieces than analysed in the first two phases so far discussed. These were discovered during the course of several excavations and were found for the most part in the environs of the Main Shrine, which in itself might suggest that they are fragments of sculpture from the early period, were it not for the fact that many of these were also reused as filling. Consequently, our sole reliable guide in attempting to date these pieces is on the basis of their stylistic approximation to sculptures whose dates are generally not a matter of controversy. The style of this phase finds its closest parallels in sculptures from Bhārhut. There is a strong tendency towards a flat, linear representation and an unsophisticated conception of space. Objects are delineated on one, at the most, two planes with large background areas left blank. The carving is neither in depth nor done with an eye to creating visual play between light and shadow. It is true that at Bhārhut tendencies that appear to be limitations of this abstract style are moulded to create an art that is inimitable in its visual impact. In the Sārnāth fragments the same qualities of flatness, of sharp contours, of a naive conception of space, of general linearity, are present, not paralleling Bhārhut in a consistently superior artistic effect, but certainly indicating that they emerge from the same stylistic tendencies and represent parallel impulses reaching towards, but not quite achieving Bhārhut's stylistic perfection.

Many of the pieces of this third stylistic phase are architectural fragments. The most important of these architectural pieces are the railing posts discovered by Marshall and Konow in 1907-1908²¹. Of the

21. MARSHALL and KONOW, « Sārnāth », *Archaeological Survey of India Annual Report*, 1907-8, pp. 69-70. These railing posts were found to the north-east of the Main Shrine. It has been assumed that when complete the rail must have consisted of fourteen uprights, five on the north and south, and four on the east and west forming a rectangle of 7½ feet by 8½ feet. Two uprights, one on the north and one on the west, were missing, as well as all coping stones and cross bars. The posts vary in length from 4'2" to 4'4". Three of the corner posts are carved on the two outer faces. One corner post and the intermediate posts are carved on one face only.

twelve posts discovered only five are illustrated in the excavation report (Marshall & Konow plate XX). These railing posts (Fig. 6) are decorated with such motifs as stūpas, leogryphs, « trīśūla » on platform with rail below, umbrella with garlands, stūpa with rail, « ghaṭapallavas » rondels with ornamental flower decoration, and one rondel in which a fish god with two tails is carved. Another important piece is a railing coping (Fig. 7) discovered by Hargreaves during the 1914-1915 excavation²². In the center of the lintel is an archaic stūpa with a railing around both the drum and the « harmikā » and surmounted by an umbrella. On either side of the stūpa are two human worshippers followed by a flower bearing creature, half human and half bird. These are followed on the right by four females bearing clubs and mounted on lions, and on the left by three similar figures on lions.

Three smaller architectural fragments were discovered by Marshall and Konow during the 1906-1907 excavations. Two of these small fragments were discovered in the pavement which surrounded the Aśoka pillar²³. Both these fragments are decorated by foliate forms carved in shallow relief with linear accents (Marshall & Konow, 1906-1907, plate XIX, nos. 2 and 3). The third piece was found on the south of the Main Shrine²⁴. This piece appears to be a fragment of a lintel carved on both faces (Marshall & Konow, 1906-1907, plate XX, nos. 1 and 2). On one side the central motif is a platform with an umbrella adorned with pendant garlands. To the right of this is a column with a Persepolitan capital, much abraded. The rest of this face is covered with a foliate pattern. On its other face is represented a small « dharmacakra » surrounded by four ornamental tridents and four « utpalas » or blue lotuses. On either side of this and separated from it by garlands are a « triratna » on a ring, which rests on a stepped pedestal. To the same phase as this are to be assigned numerous smaller fragments uncovered by Hargreaves during the 1914-1915 excavations²⁵.

All these pieces assigned to the third phase have several stylistic qualities in common with each other and with Bhārhut. In all these pieces the carving is shallow with large background spaces left blank.

22. H. HARGREAVES, « Excavations at Sārnāth », 1914-15, p. 107. This piece was found on the east side of the small circular structure north of the Main Shrine. It is 9 feet in length and is 10 inches high. Not illustrated in report.

23. J. H. MARSHALL & S. KONOW, « Sārnāth », 1906-7, p. 68. It has been surmised by these excavators that this pavement was constructed to keep the inscription on the shaft open to view at a time when the ground around the pillar had risen. No measurements are available.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 73. No measurements are supplied in the report. See also D. R. SAHNI, *Catalogue of the Museum of Archaeology at Sārnāth*, p. 215. MARSHALL and KONOW considered this a Mauryan piece without any specific stylistic analysis, see p. 76 of their 1906-7 report.

25. H. HARGREAVES, « Excavations at Sārnāth », 1914-15, p. 116. Plate LXVII, nos. 1-10. These are of varying sizes on their major axes from $5\frac{1}{2}$ to $6\frac{5}{8}$ ". According to HARGREAVES, these are from at least eight different monuments. In all cases the ornamentation is floral.

This necessarily leads to a simple and archaic compositional scheme where the representation is on one plane. The lintel depicting the worship of a stūpa (Fig. 7) exemplifies these characteristics and a comparison with reliefs from Bhārhut emphasizes and supports the designation of these pieces to what has been labelled the Bhārhut phase of sculptural style at Sārnāth²⁶.

In both the Sārnāth lintel and various Bhārhut rondels figures are squat with large, mask-like faces and bodies that are abstract renditions of real shapes. The contours of their bodies are sharp and meet the picture plane at right angles. The shallow carving and the large blank interspaces create no effect of spatial recession or complex interplay of background and foreground areas to evoke an impression of volume and depth. Wherever we encounter representations of foliate forms the emphasis is on the linear and the decorative. This is in clear evidence in the small lintel fragments (Hargreaves, 1914-1915, plate LXVII, nos. 1-10) and in the decoration on the railing posts (Fig. 6 and Fig. 7). Again the similarity of these depictions to Bhārhut is extremely close. The depiction of flora is not, as in the Mauryan phase, anchored firmly on close observation of the organic form following its own laws of the movement and growth of petals, stems and leaves. Rather, an abstract pattern has been imposed on these to create a symmetrical, decorative design with the minimum attention given to verisimilitude in reproducing natural forms. Human, animal and vegetal forms are all submitted to this abstract, decorative impulse where naturalism is of less significance than the overall perfection of abstract design.

The same artistic impulse is responsible for another piece, a yakṣa represented in the round (Fig. 8). This yakṣa was uncovered by Oertel during the 1904-1905 excavations²⁷. The slight discrepancy in the treatment of the torso and legs of this figure complicates the categorization of this yakṣa in the third phase of sculptures at Sārnāth. The upper half of the figure is treated in a flat, cubical style with the stomach, chest and shoulders reduced to rectilinear shapes. The stomach is separated from the chest by a sharp incision rather than by means of modulated surfaces merging into each other. The necklace consists of flat, linear strands from which three long flat beads are suspended. The body is cut sharply in two by a girdle that is tied in the middle and hangs down in two flat strands. The legs of the yakṣa are, however, rendered as heavy, swollen masses that are at odds with the flatter

26. For illustrations of the sculptures from Bhārhut, see A. COOMARASWAMY, *La Sculpture du Bharhut*, Annales du Musée Guimet, Nouvelle Série, VI (1956) and S. C. KALA, *Bharhut Vedika* (Allahabad, 1951).

27. F. O. OERTEL, « Excavations at Sārnāth », *Archaeological Survey of India Annual Reports*, 1904-5, p. 86, fig. 10, and p. 95. This yakṣa was found north-east of the Main Shrine in an area where OERTEL uncovered a series of stūpas during his excavation. See OERTEL plan of site on plate XVI, findspot 137. The figure is 2 feet 9 inches high with the head and arms missing.

treatment of the rest of the body. At the risk of preciousity one is inclined to place this yakṣa in a post-Bhārhut phase on the basis of the volume, weight and roundness of the legs, as these suggest a movement towards the plasticity and fullness of Sāñchī Stūpa 1 forms. A closer look at Bhārhut yakṣas prevents a hasty proliferation of stylistic phases. These Bhārhut yakṣas have the same combination of the cubical and the linear side by side with a certain rotundity that imparts a sense of weight and volume²⁸. Ultimately the Sārnāth yakṣa finds itself comfortably placed in the same artistic ambience as the Bhārhut yakṣa, i.e. in the third phase of evolution posited for the early sculptures from Sārnāth.

The final stylistic phase at Sārnāth is represented by a few remarkable pieces. Before describing the circumstances of their discovery and analysing their style the designation of this fourth phase as a phase analogous with Bodhgayā and Sāñchī Stūpa 1 requires clarification. Scholarship is divided with regard to the chronological sequence of these two sites as scholars generally place Bodhgayā midway between Bhārhut and Sāñchī Stūpa 1. It is however, possible to demonstrate that stylistically Bodhgayā is not midway between Bhārhut and Sāñchī Stūpa 1 but considerably closer to Sāñchī Stūpa 1 than to Bhārhut. The Sārnāth pieces to be discussed in this fourth phase are not all identical with pieces from Bodhgayā or with those from Sāñchī Stūpa 1. Rather, three of these major sculptures from Sārnāth may more appropriately be compared with sculptures from Bodhgayā and two with sculptures from Sāñchī Stūpa 1. Thus the fourth phase of sculptures from Sārnāth exemplifies the two trends postulated by P. Chandra²⁹: one evolving in the direction of Bodhgayā and the other in the direction of the gateways of Sāñchī Stūpa 1. What complicates this division into dual strains is that all five Sārnāth pieces are stylistically so similar that they require to be grouped in one category. Their designation in the fourth phase which is seen as analogous to Bodhgayā and Sāñchī Stūpa 1 indicates not so much a minutely precise sequence as a general placement within the first century B.C. This general placement avoids a proliferation of stylistic phases that might be confusing in this initial attempt at postulating a chronology, and in no way obscures our understanding of the clear chronological evolution of the style of the Sārnāth sculptures from the third century B.C. (Mauryan) to the first century B.C. (Bodhgayā/Sāñchī Stūpa 1).

Three of the five major pieces from Sārnāth to be considered in this final phase were discovered by Hargreaves during the 1914-1915 excavations³⁰. Of these three pieces of sculpture, one found in two pieces now rejoined, depicts a female often referred to as a Yakṣi

28. For examples of Bhārhut yakṣas see S. C. KALA, *Bharhut Vedita*, nos. 8, 9, 10 and 11. Yakṣas supporting the platform of elephant riders from the first rail pillar of Bhārhut in The Indian Museum in Calcutta also support this view.

29. P. CHANDRA, *Catalogue of the Stone Sculpture in the Allahabad Museum*, p. 20.

30. H. HARGREAVES, « Excavations at Sārnāth », 1914-15, pp. 111-16.

(Fig. 9)³¹. The head is lost and the body is bare to the waist which is bound with a girdle from which a small fringed tassel hangs. Below the waist there are indications of drapery although the navel is indicated as if the body were bare. The neck is adorned with an elaborate necklace or a combination of a torque and a necklace. The right arm is bent at the elbow and the upraised right hand (now lost) held a heavy garland hanging in front of the shoulders and reaching up to the hips. The legs are draped in a garment that falls in graceful though slightly schematic folds to the feet (now lost). The other two pieces found at the same time and in the same area by Hargreaves are two heads. One of these is definitely a female head (fig. 10) and the other is probably also the head of a female though its heavily damaged condition makes this identification uncertain³².

Stylistically all three pieces find their closest parallels in sculptures from Bodhgayā such as the Bodhgayā yakṣi³³. Notwithstanding the differences in ornament and minor details of dress and posture the Sārnāth Yakṣi (Fig. 9) is stylistically a close counterpart of the Bodhgayā Yakṣi. The two yakṣis resemble each other in the general proportions of their bodies, both possessing heavy breasts, high narrow waists, full hips, and legs covered in drapery that falls in a series of folds that might be interchanged without affecting the stylistic coherence of the two sculptures. Over the left thigh the drapery consists of small, tubular folds arranged in parallel rows that stop some inches above the knee in an oblique, serrated edge, shorter on the left than on the right. Over the right thigh the folds are slightly more complex. On the inner edge they fall in thin, long flutes that widen and curve upwards on the outer side as they are pulled up and around the hips that are thereby given fullness and volume. In both yakṣis the upper half of the body is bare except for the elaborate ornaments around the neck, and the waist girdle on the Sārnāth yakṣi and the hip girdle on the Bodhgayā yakṣi. In both the exposed flesh is rendered as soft and resilient and of a type which achieves a remarkably tactile effect in such areas as around the navel. The swelling surfaces of the body modulate into each other with ease, achieving particularly felicitous effects as in the flesh around the shoulders merging into the gradually swelling breasts. The contours are curvilinear as the flat, cubical, Bhārhut rendering of areas such as the stomach, shoulders, and chest have given way to round, modelled surfaces whose profiles are graceful curves.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 112. This figure is of gray unpolished sandstone and measures 1'5" in height. Illustrated in report on plate LXVc.

32. H. HARGREAVES, «Excavations at Sārnāth», 1914-15, p. 113. These heads are not illustrated in the excavation report, however, there is a high probability that he is describing these heads in numbers 17 and 18. They are listed as being 4¼ and 5½ inches high respectively. Photographs available at Epstein Archive, University of Chicago.

33. L. BACHHOFFER, *Early Indian Sculpture*, pl. 39. A. COOMARASWAMY, «La Sculpture de Bodhgayā», *Ars Asiatica*, XVIII, 1935, plate XXIX, pp. 19-20.

The same style is expressed in the two heads from Sārnāth. So much so that one is tempted to see one of these Sārnāth heads (Fig. 10) as completing the headless yakṣi. This face from Sārnāth echoes the general form and features of the face of the Bodhgayā Yakṣi. Both have round, slightly heavy faces, ample cheeks, full lips, sharply defined eyelids, and hair that is swept upwards in a generous cluster of flutelike braids. The swelling areas of the cheeks, chin and lips have a remarkable softness to which the play of light and shadow adds a sensuous tactility. In both there is an emphasis on those aspects of plasticity and modeling that were suppressed at Bhārhut and find full expression at Sāñchī Stūpa 1.

The other two major pieces of sculpture from Sārnāth that belong to this fourth phase are a bas-relief and a capital. The bas-relief (Fig. 11) representing the worship of a stūpa by an elephant and a « kinnara » or a harpy was discovered by Oertel in 1904-1905³⁴. The capital (Fig. 12) depicting on one side a rider on a horse and on the other an elephant with two riders was discovered by Marshall and Konow during the 1906-1907 excavations³⁵. This capital is of the Persepolitan type with volutes and honeysuckle representation. It is fortunate that from each of the four phases we have sculptures with animal representations that facilitate stylistic comparisons. Having analysed the animals on the abacus of the Sārnāth lion capital, the nīlgai head of the proto-Bhārhut phase, and the lion head from Bhārut, we are in a position to quickly place the horse and the elephants of this capital and the bas-relief within a stylistic context. Neither the emphatic statement of structure characteristic of the Mauryan phase nor the reduction to flat cubical forms of Bhārhut accommodate the rendering of animals of this final phase. Their closest parallels are the unabashedly fleshy forms of elephants on Sāñchī Stūpa 1³⁶. In these elephants from Sāñchī the animating force of musculature has been subordinated to the soft, yielding roundness of layers of flesh. The flowers and leaves likewise have a heavy, succulent quality far removed from the crisp clarity of the Mauryan foliage, or the flat, linear, ornamental ones of Bhārhut. The carving is deep and the interplay of dark background areas with the frontal planes of the carving creates an effect of almost unlimited depth. The blank spaces of the previous phase have been enlivened with carving and the ensuing compositional complexity gives vitality to these sedulously soft surfaces.

34. F. O. OERTEL, « Excavations at Sārnāth », 1904-5, pp. 88-9, fig. 12. On OERTEL plan, plate XVI, findspot is marked 427. It was found to the east of the Main Shrine and is 1'5" high. OERTEL does not date the piece.

35. MARSHALL & KONOW, « Sārnāth », 1906-7, p. 72, plate XIX, nos. 4, 5 & 6. Found some ten feet from the northwest corner of the Main Shrine. No dimensions are given, however it is dated in the Late Mauryan period.

36. BACHHOFFER, *Early Indian Sculpture*, plate 48. North Gate of Sāñchī Stūpa 1, left jamb, lower panel. « Paradise of Indra » (?).

Many of the smaller fragments discovered by Hargreaves during the 1914-1915 excavations also fall within this stylistic phase³⁷. The volutes with rosettes of these fragmentary capital remains are akin to the volutes of the capital discovered by Marshall and Konow, and in the depth of their carving the heaviness of the forms delineated, and general plasticity they recall the sculptures of Sāñchī Stūpa 1.

This analysis of the sculptures from Sārnāth in a four phase evolution of style has a dual importance. Firstly, sculptures hitherto neglected have been analysed and been ordered in a chronological sequence on the basis of their style. Secondly, in analysing these sculptures on the basis of their relationship to styles flourishing elsewhere in north India it has become eminently clear that artistic styles were not confined to one great center but found roots and flourished on a pan-Indian basis. This insight is of significance as it points out the need for surveying sculptural styles of various centers as a cohesive process rather than seeing each center as an isolated phenomenon. Within this cohesive process the early sculptures from Sārnāth make their contribution by documenting stylistic tendencies prevailing in north India from the third century to the first century B.C.

APPENDIX A

BREAKDOWN OF SĀRNĀTH SCULPTURES INTO FOUR STYLISTIC PHASES

Mauryan phase (3rd century B.C.)

1. Sārnāth Lion Capital. Oertel, 1904-5.
2. Fragments of birds. Hargreaves, 1914-15, pl. LXVI, nos. 6-14.
3. Fragments of animals. Hargreaves, 1914-15, pl. LXVI, nos. 15-20 and no. 23.
4. Fragmentary panels decorated by lotus rhizome. Hargreaves, 1914-15, p. LXVI, nos. 19, 20 and 23.

Transition from Mauryan to Bhārhut phase

1. Seven human heads. Hargreaves, 1914-15.
2. Nilgai head. Hargreaves, 1914-15.
3. Two fragments of a bull. Hargreaves, 1914-15, pl. LXVI, nos. 21 and 22.

37. H. HARGREAVES, « Excavations at Sārnāth », 1914-15, pp. 111-17. These are fragments of capitals (plate LXVII, nos. 12, 14 and 21-29) and other architectural fragments (nos. 11, 13, 18-20). Dimensions are not given in the report. They are listed under Mauryan and other early remains.

Bhārhut phase (2nd century B.C.)

1. Thirteen large architectural fragments, 12 railing posts. Marshall and Konow, 1907-8, pl. XX. Lintel or railing coping, Hargreaves, 1914-15.
2. Three small architectural fragments. Marshall and Konow, 1906-7, pl. XIX, nos. 2 and 3, pl. XX, nos. 1 and 2 (two views).
3. Other architectural fragments. Hargreaves, 1914-15, pl. LXVII, nos. 1-10.
4. Yakṣa. Oertel, 1904-5, fig. 10.

Sāñchī Stūpa 1/Bodhgayā phase (1st century B.C.)

1. Yakṣi. Hargreaves, 1914-15.
2. Two Yakṣi heads. Hargreaves, 1914-15.
3. A bas-relief. Oertel, 1904-5.
4. A capital. Marshall and Konow, 1906-7.
5. Other small fragments. Hargreaves, 1914-15, pl. LXVII, nos. 11-4 and nos. 18-29.